

invested \$670 billion in the Paycheck Protection Program. Every time I say a number like that—or \$3 trillion—I still have to pinch myself that we are spending the money. We need to spend this money in order to meet this pandemic, but the Paycheck Protection Program, in particular, has been a lifeline for America's small business owners, especially in my State.

Texas received more than \$41 billion through more than 417,000 individual PPP loans. This has given our businesses the resources they need to stay afloat and stay connected to their employees until things can return to whatever the next normal is.

But we know the process is happening much faster for some businesses than others. It is interesting: A number of businesses, I would say, are flourishing during the pandemic—it is really, really interesting—while others are just flat on their backs or nonexistent.

Many small businesses that have already received PPP loans are still operating at a significant loss. They are unable to bring in enough revenue to keep their businesses and employees above water, and they need more assistance. Again, that is because of a lack of demand or because of restrictions governments have placed on people in the interest of public health—some of them seemingly pretty arbitrary. I won't go down that path here. But these folks need help.

Currently, those businesses aren't eligible for a second draw of the PPP, and unless we want Main Streets across the country to turn into ghost towns, that needs to change. We need to reopen the PPP with additional funding for the hardest hit businesses to receive a second loan. This is the most effective way of keeping Americans connected with their employers and more small businesses on track for a strong postpandemic recovery.

There are a number of other businesses—small businesses—that didn't qualify for the PPP which need our assistance, too. Things like small, independent music venues are the best example of a critical Main Street industry that is dying under the current COVID restrictions.

That is why I worked with our friend from Minnesota, Senator KLOBUCHAR, to introduce the Save Our Stages Act, which will keep independent venues across America from closing their doors for good. This wouldn't just apply to live music venues in Austin, TX. This would apply to symphonies and, potentially, Broadway. This would apply across the board.

I am proud to say that 56 of our colleagues have cosponsored the Save Our Stages Act, making it one of the most widely supported stimulus proposals before the Senate.

Again, I know the Presiding Officer has had his shoulder to the grindstone on this topic for a long time now. We still have a lot of work to do, but we don't have much time.

Beyond these three goals, there is a lot more I would like to see in the re-

lief bill, and I guarantee all 535 Members of Congress would like to see more for other things in the relief bill. But the fact of the matter is, we have been unable to reach an agreement on a bill that includes the most controversial priorities, and it is time to take action where we can act and where we do have consensus and come back next year and try to do more and try to do better.

Each of these areas I just mentioned—support for vaccines, our workers, and small businesses—have that sort of strong bipartisan support. So I think all 100 of us—whether Republicans, Independents, or Democrats—should be able to line up behind a bill that supports these goals. Over the last several days, we have seen more bipartisan communication and cooperation than we saw in months—in the months leading up to this point, certainly since March. And I hope we are able to reach an agreement and pass another relief bill before gaveling out. As a matter of fact, I heard the majority leader say we are not leaving until we do, and I agree with that.

The American people have repeatedly called on Congress to provide support for those hit hardest by this pandemic, and we simply cannot and will not let them down.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). The Senator from Arkansas.

DEBORAH SAMPSON ACT

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize a significant legislative victory the Senate delivered for women veterans that will eliminate barriers to care and services that many women face when accessing the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VA estimates that women make up approximately 10 percent of our Nation's veteran population. That number is expected to increase to more than 16 percent within the next 25 years. As a result, the number of women veterans receiving healthcare from the VA has more than tripled since 2000.

The changing face of our military requires us to reexamine how we can best serve these veterans. The VA has been slow to modernize its delivery of healthcare and benefits to support their needs. Women veterans are more likely to face homelessness, unemployment, and go without needed medical healthcare. They are reluctant to turn to the VA for help. More than 50 percent of women veterans believe they are not entitled to or eligible for VA care. We must do more to fulfill our promise.

We need to create a culture at the VA that welcomes women veterans and makes them feel like they belong. It is long overdue, and we need to update the belief that when a woman seeks care at the VA, it is because her husband is the veteran. So often, it is not uncommon for a veteran employee to pass a woman in line and ask, you know, is her husband around.

Arkansans have shared with me suggestions for improvement that include:

expanding care options women can access at the VA to reduce the need for referrals to community care, increasing trained medical professionals who specialize in women's health issues, and enhancing privacy in exam rooms. These are reasonable steps that the VA can implement to ensure equitable access to services.

The good news is, we are one step closer to making these upgrades a reality, thanks to Senate passage of the Deborah Sampson Act. The Veterans' Affairs ranking committee member, JON TESTER, and I introduced this legislation, fittingly, named after a Revolutionary War veteran who disguised herself as a man to help defeat the British. In her spirit, we must do more to address the gender disparities at the VA.

We used the recommendations we heard from veterans in Arkansas, Montana, and all across the country to develop our legislation to eliminate the barriers to care. The Deborah Sampson Act creates a dedicated Office of Women's Health at the VA, expands the reintegration and readjustment group, counseling retreats for women veterans and their families, and improves call center services.

It increases the number of gender-specific providers and coordinators in VA facilities, trains clinicians, and retrofits VA facilities to bolster privacy and improve the environment. It provides access to legal services for women veterans and expands childcare for veterans receiving healthcare at the VA.

These are just a few of the improvements this bill requires the VA to implement so we can better serve the needs of women veterans.

I appreciate the leadership of Senator TESTER and the support of veterans service organizations and encourage Members of Congress to support this legislation. I applaud the Senate for advancing the legislation and urge my colleagues in the House of Representatives to quickly approve this bill so we can ensure women who serve in uniform receive the care and services that they so earned.

Also, as always, I want to thank the staffs of myself and Senator TESTER who worked so hard in this regard, and, simply, this would not have become law without their tremendous efforts.

So, with that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BRAUN). The Senator from Wyoming.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to ask our Democratic colleagues to join us Republicans in providing immediate relief—relief in the fight against coronavirus and economic relief for the people of this country.

Americans don't ask much of their government, but they are asking us for something right now. No. 1, they are asking to help control the spread of the coronavirus, and, No. 2, they are asking to help with an economic recovery.